



Lenses of Literary Analysis

New Criticism

An American movement from the 1920's, this approach emphasizes a close reading of text. New Critics maintain that the *meaning is inherent in the text itself*; the work alone must be studied to understand how the author created meaning. A text is first and foremost a text and the scrutiny of structure and literary elements (point of view, setting, narrative structure, irony, symbols, tone, etc.) take primary consideration.

Biographical

The assumption behind this approach is that *all fiction is, in essence, autobiographical*. If the critic studies the life of the author thoroughly enough, then he/she will be able to discover the true meaning and intent of the work itself. Every literary character is considered to mirror a person known by the author and every event in the work is derived from the author's own experience.

Sociological or Historical

The connection between the arts and the times in which they are created is considered indivisible.

Literature is directly shaped by the history of that particular society through predominant themes and character types.

Marxist

Based on Karl Marx's economic and political theories, Marxist critics see the individual person as a product of society's value system, and therefore look at texts to expose *how characters are constructed by their class and economy*.

Archetypal

This approach focuses on *universal themes, struggles, and roles in society* that appear in myths, dreams, and literature. Some common archetypes seen universally in literature are themes of creation, loss of innocence, and the hero cycle, and characters such as the rebel, trickster, and wanderer. These archetypes originate from the collective unconscious of “inherited memories” (Jung) and can be traced through all societies and cultures in different manifestations.

Feminist

Feminist critics emphasize the politics of *gender differences and male dominance* in analysis of literature. By examining how women authors have written, and how women characters have been written about, they can understand the roles women have typically been assigned in society, especially that of victim.

Reader response

This theory centers on the *interaction between reader and text*. Readers read the text carefully and develop an understanding of the text based on their own experiences in relationship to the information presented by the author. The text provides the words and ideas and the reader provides a personal response; the two together create meaning.

Psychological

This approach reflects the effect that modern psychology has had upon study of literature. Sigmund Freud's exploration of wish-fulfillment, sexuality, the unconscious, repression, and the mental struggle between the id, ego, and superego are linked to literature through:

1. An investigation of the creative process of the artist
2. The psychological study of a particular artist, usually noting how an author's biographical circumstances affect or influence their motivations and/or behavior.
3. The analysis of fictional characters using the language and methods of psychology.

Intertextuality

This theory insists that *a text cannot exist as a self-sufficient whole*. The writer is a reader of other texts before he or she became a creator and so therefore the writer's work is inevitably filled with references, quotations, and influences from these other texts. In addition, readers bring awareness of other texts to their reading of the current one but may miss unknown allusions. This theory extricates connections between texts as a means for interpretation.

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